

# TYPODAY 2015

Typography, Sensitivity and Fineness'  
<http://www.typoday.in>

## Multilingual Design and Branding

Sulekha Rajkumar, Brand Union, India, [sulekha.rajkumar@gmail.com](mailto:sulekha.rajkumar@gmail.com)

### Abstract:

The focus of this paper is to explore and understand the need for multilingual typography, its challenges and how it can be incorporated into mainstream graphic design through branding.

*Key words: Multilingual Design, Branding, Regional Scripts, Display Type*

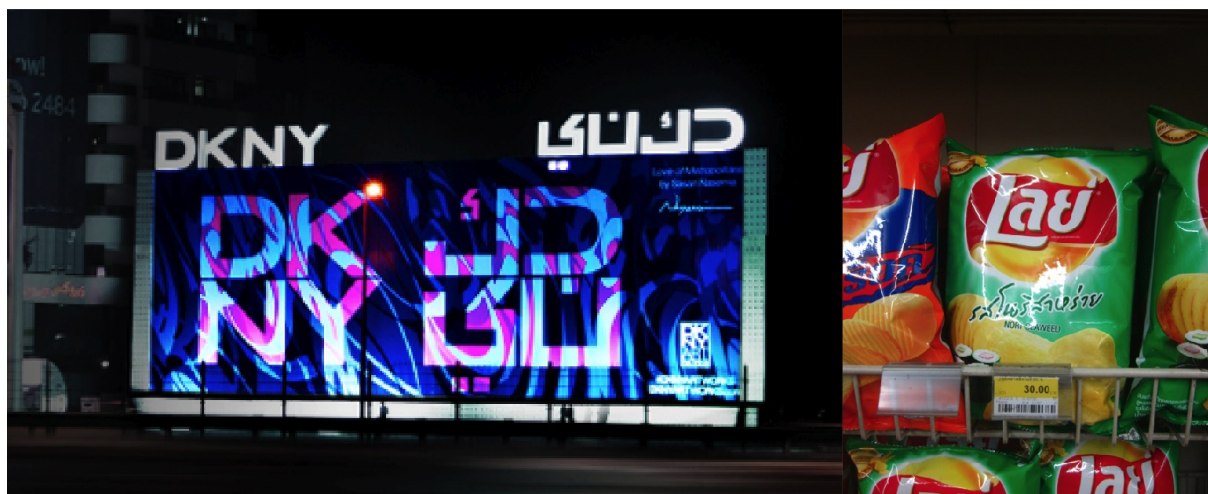
### 1. Introduction

India is a country with great linguistic diversity. The average Indian can speak at least two languages. While there are two official languages – Hindi and English, a significant number of people cannot relate to either of them.



In the past, in order to cater to this, the commercial landscape, or 'brandscape', in India was multilingual in nature. Signs would carry the name of the shop in regional scripts as well as English. Packaging was designed in more than one script. Today, however, we see a huge change in the way brands appear, especially in the larger cities. With the increase in globalisation, brands have adopted English as a unified language of communication. There seems to be a trend in wanting to look 'westernised'.

On a visit to Dubai, I saw a host of some of the biggest brands plastered all over the city. What particularly drew me to the place was how local brands have embraced the local culture, and how international brands have adapted to it. All communication is bilingual. All signs are in Latin and Arabic. Latin logos sit proudly next to their beautifully crafted Arabic versions. In Bangkok, I spent a lot of time in supermarkets studying the typography on packaging. I was able to recognise familiar brands, even though the packaging was in a script alien to me.



The commercial landscape in the two cities is a beautiful harmony of global and local. It made me stop and wonder – why do we not see this in India anymore? Have we become apologetic of our native languages? Have we stopped making the effort to cater to India's diversity? What role and responsibility do we, as designers, have in all of this?

### 1.1. How can design have an impact on culture and society?

“Typography is the craft of endowing human language with a durable visual form.” – Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style*



1635 rationalised mother tongues\*, over 850 spoken languages, 22 official languages and 11 recognised scripts. India boasts of a rich and varied linguistic heritage. Like art and music, languages and scripts form an integral part of culture. The disturbing truth is that with the accelerated rate of globalisation across both the urban and rural areas, many scripts have become endangered or extinct. Creating design that embraces more than one script is one step towards preserving this culture.

\* according to 2011 census

## 1.2. What's in it for brands?

Inclusivity. The success of a brand can be directly related to the social, cultural and emotional connect it has with its audience. Design helps create this connect on a subconscious level and multilingual branding is one way of doing so. What sets a brand apart is not just following the mandate on multilingual signage, but adopting a multilingual approach that is sensitive to the local culture. It must adapt its identity to the local script while maintaining the essence of the brand and the authenticity of the script.



Fig. 1.1



Fig. 1.2

The two images above (Fig. 1.1 & 1.2) represent the signage of Pizza Hut in Mumbai and Chennai respectively. The typography on both signs is well crafted and well executed. However, there seems to be a bit of injustice done while adapting the brand to one of the local scripts. While the characteristic of the Latin logotype has been captured in its Devanagari avatar, the Tamil version falls short. Its stiff upright letters do not reflect the playfulness, warmth and food-like quality of the Pizza Hut brand.



Fig. 1.3



Fig. 1.4

The two images above (Fig. 1.3 & 1.4) represent how Vodafone and Airtel have embraced the local script in their signage. Which one appears to be the more inclusive brand? Which of the two brands are users more likely to connect with?

## **2. How can design do all this? And what are the challenges that one faces?**

By creating a visual 'brandscape' that is multilingual in nature, design can play a powerful role in preserving culture and helping brands connect with a wider audience. However, with every task comes a set of challenges, for example:

### **2.1. Lack of real estate area on signage for multiple scripts**

The real estate allotted to signage is not always sufficient to have two logos of equal size. Importance can be given to the regional logo in more ways than size. Detail in the execution of the logo and placing it strategically on the facade can address this problem. Even if the regional logo is small, a well-crafted and prominently positioned logo will not go unnoticed.

### **2.2. Unlike Dubai and Bangkok, India has more than just one local script**

While the task is not so simple for packaging due to cost and distribution restrictions, it can be easily resolved for brand signage. We can look at functional signage (road signs, stations, way finding, instructional signs, etc.) to answer this question. Functional signage adopts a bilingual or trilingual approach. The communication is always in one or both official languages (English and Hindi) along with the regional language.

### **2.3. Clients are not willing to pay for the design of regional logos**

In the past, a client would hire a designer to design a logo. There would be an additional cost for brand collaterals like corporate stationery. We've seen a shift in this approach to branding. Designers and clients agree that a brand is bigger than just the logo, and creating a brand includes the design of the logo, its brand language, and primary brand collaterals. Similarly, if designers were to include regional logos as part of the package of any branding project, clients would see it as integral to the design and not just another collateral.

### **2.4. Clients don't see the importance of regional logos**

As important as it is to be a good designer, it is also essential to know how to sell a design to a client. One can help the client understand that a multilingual approach is in the interest of the brand in terms of inclusivity and having a positive impact in the long run.

### **2.5. Designers are only familiar with one or two scripts**

It takes a deep understanding of type, scripts and aesthetics to create design that transcends beyond a single script. Just as one partners with illustrators, photographers and copy writers depending on the nature of the project, one can collaborate with typographers to achieve a complete multilingual brand identity.

### **3. Examples of Multilingual Design**

I'd like to illustrate this approach with some of the work I have done across various forms of brand communication.

#### **3.1. Capturing the Essence of the Brand in Regional Logos**

A logotype is a picture made of letters. When designing a logotype, one carefully selects or creates a typographic style that represents the soul of the brand. It could be a youthful brand or have a strong legacy. It could be classic or modern, serious or playful.

Thereafter, when adapting the logotype from one script to another, it is important to adapt the essence of the typeface rather than replicate its form. And in doing so, one must maintain the authenticity of the respective script.

Refreshing Paradise's identity was one such exercise. Paradise, established in 1953, is a popular chain of restaurants in Hyderabad, primarily known for its signature biryani. The new identity needed to be distinct, have food appeal, and represent a contemporary brand backed by a rich legacy and tradition.

Old and New Identity



Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan

Latin and Kannada

PARADISE

ಪ್ಯಾರಾಡೈಸ್

Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan

Following are a few more examples:



Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan



Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan  
Pack Design: Anya Rangaswami  
Regional Logo: Sulekha Rajkumar



उचाचा विचार करा  
सन्मानाने रहा!

कल की सोचो  
सर उठा के जियो!

ଆଗ କଥା ଭାବ  
ସ୍ୱାମିନାନେ ସହିତ ରିହା!

எதிர்காலத்தைப் பற்றி யோசித்திடுவீர்  
தலை நிமிர்ந்து வாழ்ந்திடுங்கள்!

आगटेल भावक  
ज्ञान बाधि आगवाक!

કાલનું વિચારો  
સ્વામિમાન થી જીવો!

ॐल री मेचे  
मिठ छुठ रे नीछे!

రేపటి గురించి ఆలోచించండి  
తలెత్తుకు జీవించండి!

നാളെയെപ്പറ്റി ചിന്തിക്കൂ  
അനന്തസ്തോടെ ജീവിക്കൂ!

ನಾಳೆ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಯೋಚಿಸಿ  
ನಿಮ್ಮನ್ನು ನೀವು ಗೌರವಿಸಿರಿ!

Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan  
Designed by Rob Andrews, Jagadev Gajare and Sulekha Rajkumar



### 3.2. Giving Visibility to the Regional Logo

As mentioned earlier, giving visible importance can be done in many ways.

**Equal Weightage:** Displaying the logos of both scripts in equal size



Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan

**Strategic Placement:** While the Kannada logo may not be part of the main sign, it has been strategically placed (at the entrance of the restaurant) to give it prominence.



Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan

### 3.3. Bringing Cultures Together

Ranga Shankara is one of India's most prestigious theatres and their annual theatre festival is a much-awaited event. The theme for the 2012 festival was 'It's Shakespeare'. What made this event unique was the fact that the plays were performed in 4 Indian, and 4 International languages. The design highlighted typography drawn from vintage theatre posters in the various scripts. The result – Shakespeare. multilingual, Indian.



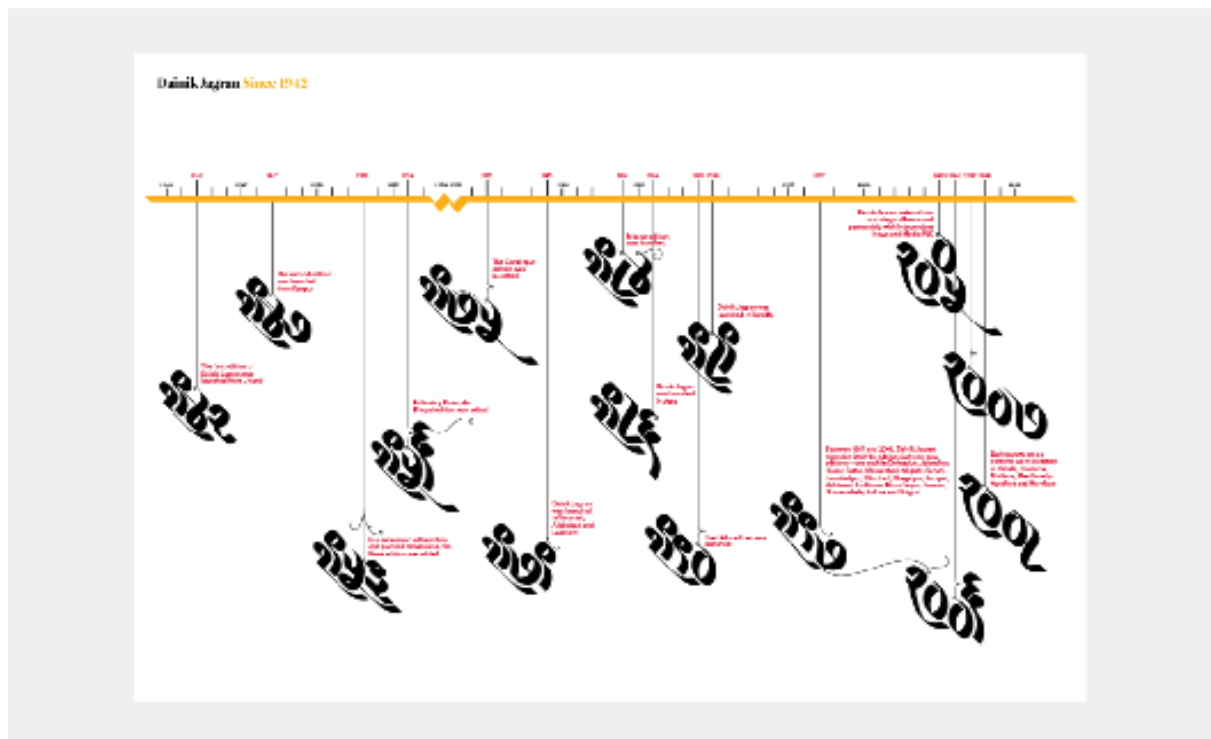
Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan

Zenzi, a popular pub in Mumbai organised an event with the Russian Embassy. The invite was designed in two scripts, to bring the Russian and Mumbai culture together.



Designed at Grandmother India

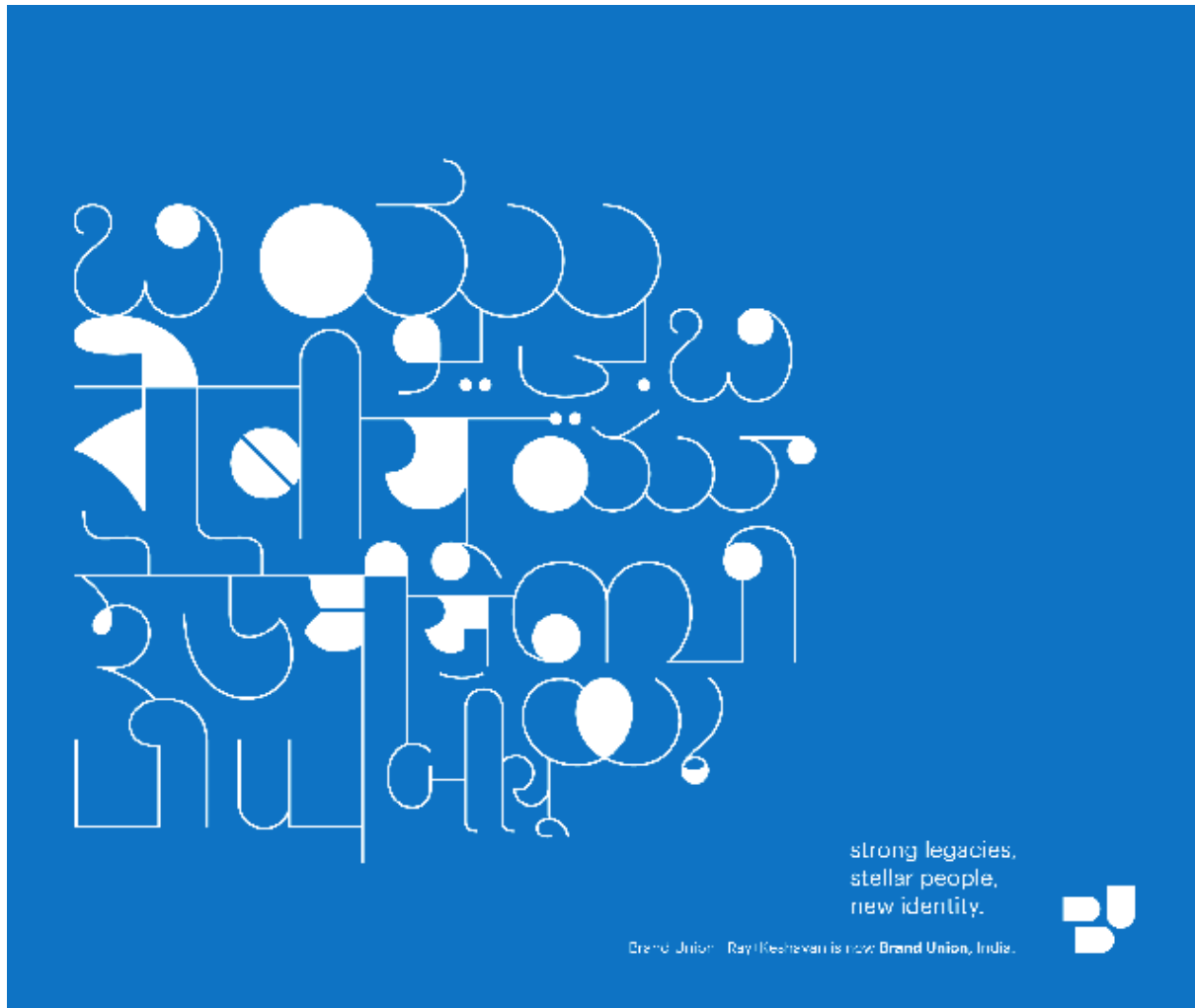
The following infographic depicts a bilingual timeline for the history of the widely read Hindi newspaper – Dainik Jagran. While the communication needed to be in English, it celebrated Hindi by depicting the dates in Devanagari through calligraphy.



Designed at Brand Union | Ray+Keshavan

### 3.4. Adapting the Global to the Local

Ray+Keshavan is a renowned design firm in India and has recently become a part of the Brand Union network. In our annual calendar, we wanted to announce the change of name of the company. In this design, Brand Union or BU, takes on different forms in all the regional scripts, representing the best of both worlds – global and local.



Designed at Brand Union

### 4. Conclusions

As conscious designers, we have the power to make a difference with the choices we make. As brand consultants, we can help brands realise that embracing local culture with respect and sensitivity is in the interest of brand, and can have an impact that is far greater than the design itself.

## **Acknowledgements**

Prof. Vinay Saynekar – I can never thank him enough for his mentorship. Apart from being an extremely talented type designer, he is an inspiring guide.

Thank you to my mentors – Kurnal Rawat, Sujata Keshavan, Rob Andrews, Ashutosh Karkhanis and Dan Ellis, for encouraging me and giving me the opportunity to explore typography in my work.

## **References**

Bringhurst, Robert, *The Elements of Typographic Style*, (2004)

Kulkarni, Sarang, White Crow Designs, *Issues with Devanagari Display Type* (2012)

DKNY image – <http://www.uae-signs.com>